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Case Closure Among the Lancaster County's Family Treatment Drug Court: The Role of Personal Relationships

Chelsey Wisehart, Katherine Hazen, & Matthew Carlson



Parent relationship with court professionals has a significant impact on time to case closure for those in the FTDC.

Introduction

- Parent substance use is the second-leading cause for childrens' removal from the home in Nebraska (Voices for Children, 2018) with 10-30% being removed again later on (Wulczyn et al., 2007).
- The theory of Therapeutic Jurisprudence suggests using a treatment-oriented approach to reduce recidivism and mitigate the negative psychological effects that the legal system may have on offenders (Fessinger et al., 2018).
- The Judge acts as a team leader for caseworkers and attorneys who use a collaborative approach in the Family Treatment Drug Court (FTDC).
- Team meetings between parents and court professionals include discussion about parents' progress to help ensure a rehabilitative environment.
- Social exchange theory says that interpersonal relationships form with the exchange of emotional resources (Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002).
- Preliminary findings suggest that FTDC participants who receive support in high quality relationships may have a faster time to case closure (Fessinger et al., 2018).
- **Research question:** Do the high quality relationships between adjudicated parents and court professionals explain faster time to case closure in FTDC?

Method

Participants

- $N = 227$
 - FTDC: $n = 231$ (81.6%)
 - Control: $n = 46$ (16.3%)
- Surveyed participants: $n = 183$
 - Father: $n = 60$ (21.2%)
 - Mother: $n = 122$ (43.1%)

Materials

- Parents' experience survey: 11-items, 5-point agreement Likert-type scale
 - Caseworker relationships (2-item, $\alpha = 0.93$)
 - Judge relationship (1-item)
- Content coding legal files in JUSTICE
 - Number of days between petition and case closure date (Time to Close)

Results

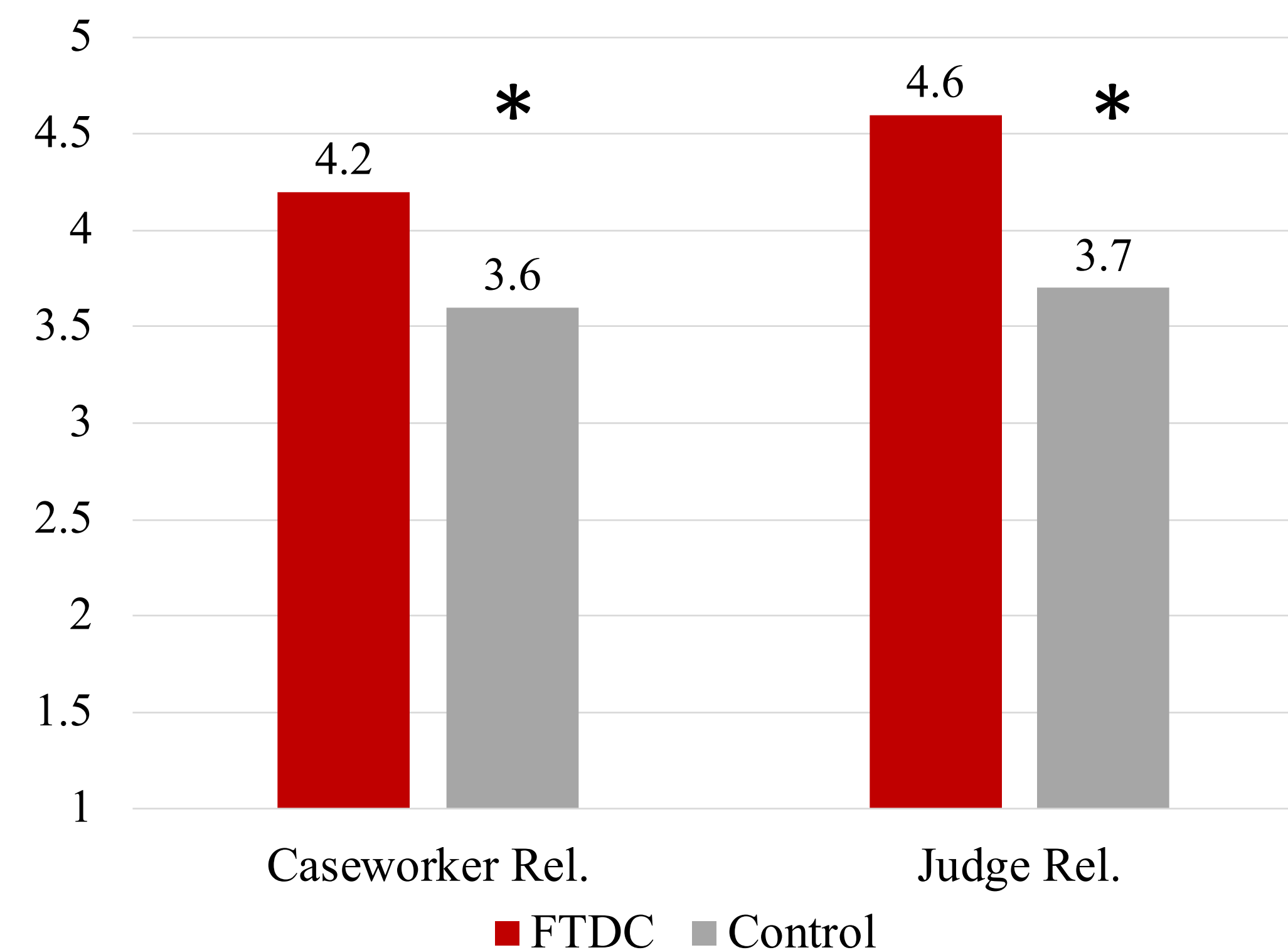


Figure 1. Mean relationship scores (5-point scale)
➤ * Indicates significant difference
➤ Caseworker: $t(5.7) = -2.408, p = .018, M_{diff} = -.604$
➤ Judge: $t(7.5) = -3.945, p = .007, M_{diff} = -.826$

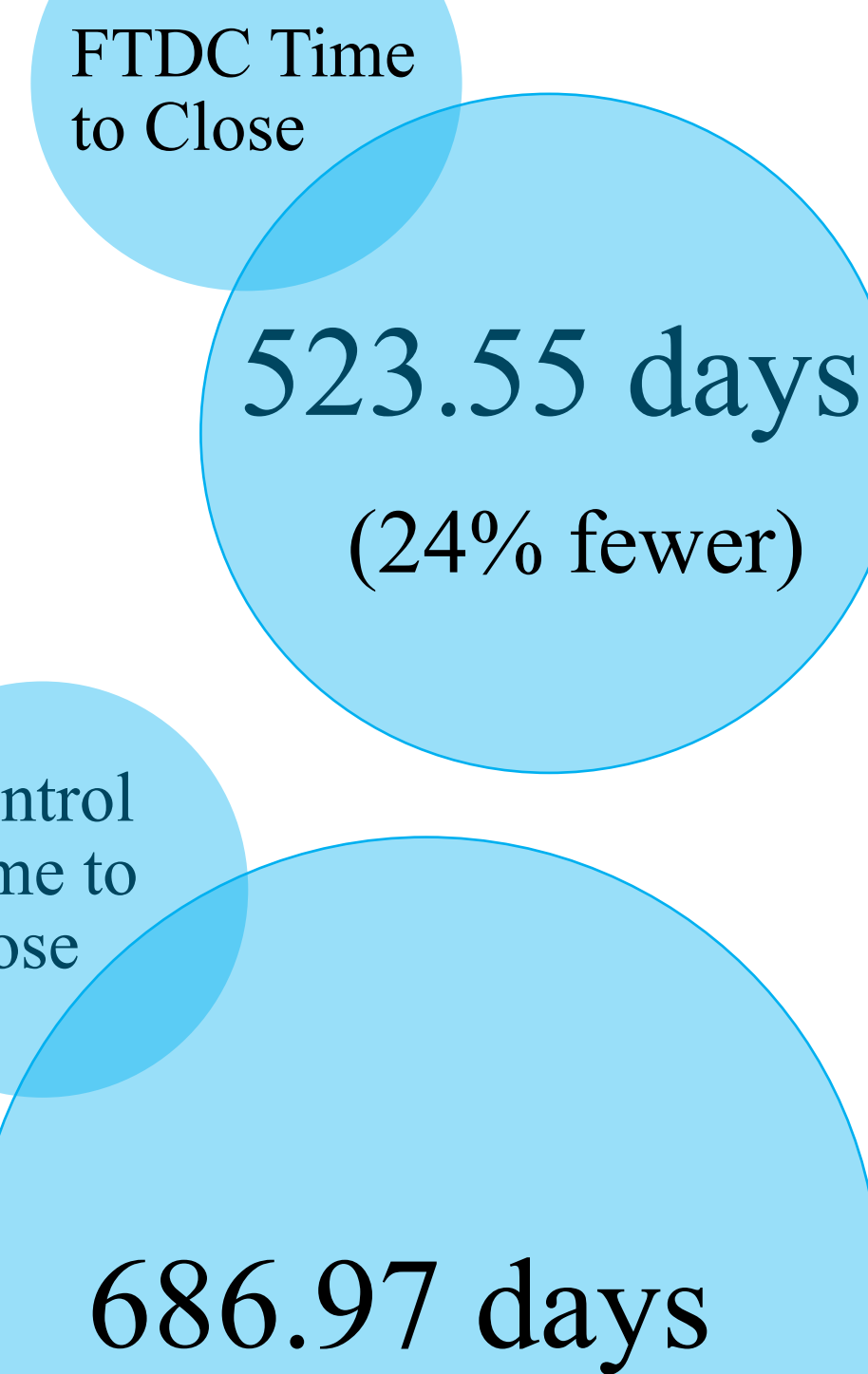


Figure 2. Mean Time to Case Closure.
 $t(208) = 3.73, p < .001, M_{diff} = 163.43$

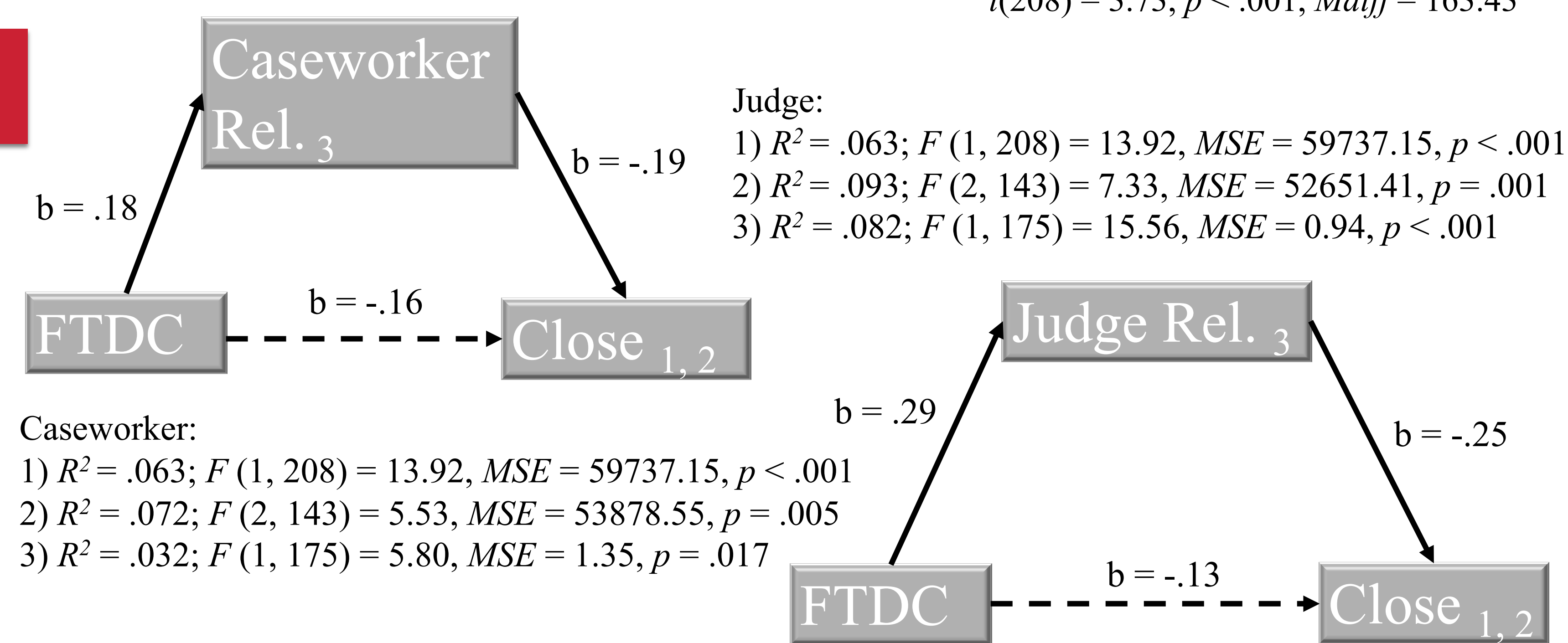


Figure 3. Regressions predicting time to case closure with FTDC through caseworker and judge relationship.

Discussion

- FTDC participants had significantly shorter time to case closure.
 - FTDC participants tended to have more positive relationships with the judge and caseworker.
 - More positive relationships were associated with shorter time to case closure.
- This aligns with Social Exchange Theory which says that the formation of high quality relationships with superiors may lead to more success (Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002).
- This means that through adjusting the dynamic between the adjudicated and court professionals, those involved can foster relationships that appear to enhance a rehabilitative process.

Limitations & Future Direction

Limitations

- Self-report data has variability that can cause concern.
 - Self-selection bias.
 - No random assignment.

Future Direction

- Examine the role of service participation in explaining time to case closure.
- How do relationships affect participation in services?

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